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Thesis

THE FRENCH THEATRE OF THE MIDDLE AGES

Submitted by

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ANALYSIS.

The French theatre had its origin in the Church in the 12th century. The only opportunity for esthetic emotions afforded the Frenchman of the Middle Ages was the pomp and ceremony of the Church. Gradually interpolations, to satisfy the public demand, were made, and the liturgical drama thus developed from the "office du jour". As time went on the action became more developed, and the mise en scène more elaborate. The best known liturgical drama was "Les Prophetes du Christ", adapted from an apocryphal sermon of Saint Augustine. At first the text of the drama varied but slightly from that of the sermon. Later the prophets became more numerous, and comic characters were introduced, such as the devils and Balaam and his ass, as a concession to the popular fondness for the grotesque.

The next step in the progress of the theatre was the "Mystère d' Adam", a drama about Adam, Eve, Cain, Abel etc., in which the characters were remarkably well depicted. The theatre became increasingly profane, a natural consequence of the vulgarity of the people. The use of Latin waned, and the vulgar language was employed in all plays, save the liturgical drama.

The ingenious art exhibited in the mechanical effects on the stage of the Middle Ages was truly remarkable.

The "Jeu de Saint Nicolas", by Jean Bodel, evidenced the pronounced profane character of the theatre. It was one of the first plays to be performed outside the church, hence its vulgarity. The plot was an amusing one based on an old legend.

The thirteenth century gave to the world the first dramatic societies. These were the puys, which, throughout northern France, were organizations of the bourgeois, at first for political, purposes, later for the promotion of poetry and music. The Puys presented both religious and profane drama, the miracle being their chief medium of dramatic expression. Rutebeuf's "Miracle de Théophile", meagre in thought and action, was the first of many composed to the honor and glory of the Virgin. "Les Quarante Miracles", although celebrated, were of even less value. In the profane genre, Adam de la Halle's "Jeu de la Feuillée" and "Jeu de Robin et de Marion", although crude, were extremely valuable and daring contributions.

The Jongleurs, the link connecting the ancient players and those of the Middle Ages, were of four classes; the danseurs, the satiriques, the chanteurs and the chanteurs de geste. Of these, only the satiriques had anything of the comedian in him. Their repertory has almost entirely disappeared. Their most notable work was the "Dit de l'Erberie", hardly of the dramatic genre, for it lacked an essential element - action.

The Fête des Fous was the origin of both sottie and "sermon joyeux", but not of the farce or the rest of the comic theatre.

The fifteenth century was the golden era for the theatre of the Middle Ages, from the point of view of actors and audience. Then it was that the societies were developed to their highest state. The leading society was the Confrérie de la Passion of Paris. At first it met with great opposition, but in 1402, was officially recognized and granted unusual

privileges. The Confrérie possessed the first permanent theatre in France, located in the Hôtel de la Trinité. Mysteries a development of the mystere mime and the miracle, constituted their repertory. All the mysteries save two were based on Christian subjects. The most common source was "Les Prophètes du Christ". The spirit of the mysteries was profane. The actors, drawn from all walks of life, were exceedingly enthusiastic over their parts. Preparation for performances entailed real hardships, but the "montres" and the performances which followed were ample reward for them. In the middle of the 15th century, perceiving that the people were tiring of the mysteries, but anxious to retain their privileges, invited the Basochiens and the Enfants-sans-Souci to share with them the Hôtel de la Trinité. From that time on, the performances were alternately serious and comic. Upon the announcement, in 1541, of the coming performance of the "Actes des Apôtres", the Confrères were confronted with two obstacles. The crudity, coarseness and immorality of the mysteries had aroused the antagonism of a people strongly influenced by the Reform and the Renaissance. The Confrérie was nevertheless premitted to continue playing mysteries under certain conditions. In 1548, as a result of the two great movements of the 16th century, the right to play sacred mysteries was taken from the Confrérie de la Passion. They were still allowed to put on profane mysteries, but the elimination of the religious play from their repertory was to deal it a death blow. In its two hundred years of existence, the Confrérie contributed nothing to the cause of the French theatre.

Temporary associations, organized like an industrial enterprise played an important role in the theatre of the Middle Ages. Their performances were the most brilliant of the period, and it is they who are responsible for the first appearance of women on the stage.

The comic theatre has enjoyed an uninterrupted tradition in France. As in the serious genre, societies were chiefly responsible for the performances of the Middle Ages.

The Basochiens, clerks of the Parlement of Paris, were the leading société joyeuses. Their repertory consisted of farces, moralities, and, by agreement with the Enfants-sans-Souci, sotties. After constant interruptions, the Basochiens came into their own in the reign of Louis XII. They were permitted to play the most daring of plays, the political satire, and were even allowed to poke fun at the King's own eccentricities. With the accession to the throne of the pleasure-loving Francis I, they were to lose their liberty, and after a veiled allusion to the King's clandestine love affairs, they were restrained by rigorous obligations and conditions. The Basoche ceased to be of any dramatic importance after the middle of the 16th century.

The Enfants-sans-Souci, before their amicable arrangement with the Basochiens, to whom they were probably subordinate, possessed a repertory of sotties.--parodies on society in general. With the Basochiens they accepted the invitation of the Confrérie de la Passion to share the Hôtel de la Trinité. The three leading Sots, Marot, Gringore and Jean du Pont-Alais, were the outstanding figures in the theatre of the Middle Ages.

Mortally wounded by the Renaissance and Reform like the Confrérie de la Passion, they succumbed - as far as the theatre was concerned - about the middle of the 16th century.

In the provinces, the leading société joyeuse was the Mère-Folle of Dijon, a direct descendant of the Fête des Fous. Like the Basoche, it had a strong organization, and Mère-Folle, the chief, was possessed of almost unlimited powers over his subjects. The Mère-Folle pretended to wish to correct bad morals, by exposing to merciless public ridicule the characteristics of those attacked. Had the Mère-Folle not indulged in political affairs, all would have gone well with it. Even so, it maintained its existence until 1630, when , after an over-bold attack upon a system of taxation, Louis ordered it to die.

The morality, similar to the comic theatre in form, to the serious theatre in aim, was a valuable product of the Middle Ages.

The farce with its coarseness and filth, and its slender stock subjects, was a favorite genre of the Middle Ages. The shining exception in a mediocre field was the farce of "Maistre Patelin", doubtless a product of the Basoche.

The colleges were an important factor in the theatre of the Middle Ages. Its comedy was a reflection of the comedy of the outside world. It was in a college that the first French comedy and the first tragedy in the style of the Renaissance were played; Jodelle's Cléopâtre and Grévin's "Les Ébahis" and "La Trésorière".

As in the case of the serious societies, the sociétés joyeuses did nothing for the improvement of the dramatic art, except to produce a few plays of note, especially "Maistre Patelin".

The probable origin of the professional comedian in France was three-fold : the jongleurs, the "joueurs de personnage" and the farceurs de métier". All lived a hazardous life, and besides had to be ready to play any kind of role in any genre. In addition to the three groups just mentioned, other possible comedians in the making were the bands of amateurs, who, for pure love of the dramatic art, went from city to city, living on voluntary contributions by échevins or audience. Italian comedians came into prominence during the reign of Francis I.

The middle of the 16th century saw the virtual end of the French theatre of the Middle Ages. There were several reasons for its decline. The first was its lack of art. For art, it tried to substitute realism, but in vain. The second was the improved taste of the audience, and, in fact, a great change in the class composing the audience. Within the brief space of four years, came the fall of the Confrérie de la Passion with its mysteries, Joachim du Bellay's appeal to the younger poets to look to pagan culture for their inspiration, the first French comedy, and the first classical tragedy in French.

THE FRENCH THEATRE
OF
THE MIDDLE AGES.

The French theatre had its origin in the Church in or about the twelfth centruy. As a matter of fact, traces can be found of the origin of the theatre as early as the ninth century, but up to the 12th century, the theatre had not entirely broken away from the Church.

It may, perhaps, seem surprising at first that the theatre, as we know it, should have originated in the Church, but consideration of the conditions existing in the Middle Ages will easily explain this seeming anomaly. In the life of the Frenchman of this period there was nothing inspiring, little interesting, aside from wars, and but one opportunity for the esthetic emotions. This opportunity was afforded by the Church. The pomp and ceremony of the church service were a joy to him, and his only wish was that the service might be longer. The mass itself was already, in form a drama with its singing alternating with recitation and with its dialogues between the officiating priest and the assistants. The basis of the mass was also dramatic in that the mass was the symbolic commemoration of the sacrifice which founded the Christian dogma. The immediate source of the drama, however, was not the mass but the "office du jour". The "office du jour" consisted of prayers or recitations dealing with the divine act, or with saints or martyrs whose memory the "office du jour" consecrated. At first it was the priest who conducted the entire service, but as time

went on, the roles were distributed to the deacon and sub-deacon. To lengthen the service which seemed wholly inadequate, interpolations were made. These interpolations or tropes, as they were called, consisted at first of only a few words. The first known interpolation dates from the latter part of the ninth century. Interpolations were very frequent in Church festivals, especially those connected with Christmas. Af first this kind of trope was merely an alternating chorus. Half the chorus asked the questions and the other half responded. Thus before the introit they would sing, "Quem quaeritis in praesepe, pastores, dicite?" (Shepherds, whom seek ye in the stable?) The reply would be, "Salvatorem, Christum, Dominum". ("the Savior, the Christ, the Lord").

The liturgical drama developed from the "office du jour" by these constant interpolations. As time went on, the mise en scène became more elaborate, the actors more numerous and the action more developed. In the scene representing the Nativity, a manger was placed behind the altar with the image of the Virgin; children were placed in various parts of the church to represent angels, one of them to announce the Nativity; shepherds in tunic and amice crossed the choir and an angel said a verse to them. Other children who were representing angels sang the "Gloria". The shepherds advanced singing "Pax in Terris". Then all united in singing "Halleluia", after which the "office du jour" was begun.

The best known of the fifty or more liturgical dramas extant, is "Les Prophètes du Christ". Its source is an apocryphal sermon of Saint Augustine based on the idea that the Old Testament is a preparation of the New. This famous sermon was first recited,

went on, the roles were distributed to the dancer and sub-dancer. To lengthen the service which second was only implicated, introductions were made. Less introductions, or proper, as they were called, indicated a first or only a few words. The introductory introductions came from the latter part of the ninth century. Introductions were very frequent in Chrétien de Troyes, sometimes accompanied with portraits. Affices this kind of [illegible] usually an item line course. Still the choice lessed the [illegible] and the other half pronoun. Thus begins the introit they [illegible]. Upon questions in prosecco, ristorse, distrey' (anywhere, where goes ye in the street) [illegible] be, [illegible], [illegible], [illegible]. (the [illegible], the [illegible], the [illegible]).

The introitus form developed from the "[illegible] in [illegible]" by [illegible] not to introduction. As time went on, [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]. The notes in [illegible] and [illegible] were developed. In the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible], a [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

then played after matins. To prove his point, the author of the sermon invoked in turn a number of prophetic witnesses. At first the dialogue was recited by one speaker who was charged with all the rôles. This was the first step in the transition from sermon to liturgical drama. The next step was to distribute the parts to different actors. Even before this, the one reciting had spoken in different tones for the various rôles.

We find in the sermon the following: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel Moses, David, Habakkuk, Simeon, Zachariah, Elizabeth and John the Baptist. Each in turn was bidden to speak. The lesson contained such a good foundation for a play that from it a liturgical drama soon arose. The manuscript of Saint Martial de Limoges followed the sermon very closely, but converted it all into a dramatic dialogue. Two other changes of some importance were made. First, the prose in the sermon became metrical throughout in the liturgical drama. In the sermon we find:

Moses

"Prophetam vobis suscitabit Deus de fratribus vestris, omnis anima que non audierit prophetam illum exterminabitur de populo suo".

In the liturgical drama:
Moses

Dabit Deus vobis vatem,
Huic, ut mihi, aurem date;
Qui non audit hunc audientem (loquentem)
Expelletur sua gente.

Jeremiah (in the sermon)
"Hic est Deus noster et non estimabitur alius absque illo".

Jeremiah (in the liturgical drama)
Sic est: hic est Deus Noster,
Sine quo non erit alter.

Daniel (in the sermon)
"Cum venerit Sanctus sanctorum, cessabit unctio".

Daniel (in the liturgical drama)
Sanctus sanctorum veniet
Et unctio deficiet.

The second change was in the order and number: Israel, Moses, Daniel, Habakkuk, David, Simeon, Elizabeth, John the Baptist, Virgil, Nebuchadnezzar and the Sybil. At Rouen there were twenty-seven personages instead of twelve, chief of whom was Balaam. Balaam was considered by the church goers as an important addition, for he was mounted on an ass. Doubtless Balaam and his ass were added as a concession to the popular fondness for the grotesque and the boisterous. In the Rouen version, action was added. Nebuchadnezzar's soldiers threw three young Hebrews into the blazing furnace, from which they came out unharmed. Nebuchadnezzar, overwhelmed by this miracle, then gave his testimony for Christ. As this play gradually grew to unwieldy proportions, it was cut into smaller dramas, each having as its centre and hero, one of the prophets. The devils, probably drawn from the same source as Balaam, were shortly afterwards added to the list of characters. They first made their appearance in "Les Vierges Sages et les Vierges Folles". They were an important addition for they diverted, somewhat, the course the theatre of the Middle Ages was to take. Soon the devils began to appear on the stage in grotesque costume, arousing terror and provoking amusement among the spectators. They acted as interludes to mark off the various episodes of the main play and relieve the tedious religious rites. With the coming of the devils, Hell naturally appeared, and the clashing of kettles in Hell was heard amid the songs of the angelic choir in Paradise.

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The production of the "Mystere d'Adam" marked a forward step

in the progress of the theatre. The characters become more like the Frenchman of the Middle Age. Adam is upright in principle, but very inconsistent and far from heroic. When tempted by Satan, he is easily able to discern right from wrong, but he succumbs almost immediately, without mental or moral struggle, to the charms of Eve. After his fall, he reproaches his seducer, but lays no blame upon himself. It is here that Adam seems weakest. Eve is a much more attractive character. Not by nature evil, she craves pleasure, and gladly endangers her soul for a taste of the forbidden fruit. Satan's temptation is delightfully put, and it is little wonder Eve rushed so readily into sin.

> "Tu es fieblette et tendre chose,
> E es plus fresche que n'est rose;
> Tu es plus blanche que cristal
> Que neif que chiet soi glace en val;
> Mal cuple en fist li cuator:
> Tu es trop tendre et il trop dur;"

Eve does not exhibit Adam's pettiness of spirit in facing her fate. Refusing to pity herself, she has compassion for Adam and the future generations. But she still has hope and she believes that in some distant day there will be redemption for them. Satan is a particularly strong character. He varies his arguments in order to find the weak spot in the armor of both Adam and Eve, and, finding it, breaks down their resistance. The characterization in the second act is no less strong. The author contrasts very forcibly Cain and Abel. Cain, expecially, is remarkably well depicted, as he early reveals himself, cruel, coarse, and selfish. There is a vigor in the simplicity and directness of the style of the "Mystère d' Adam", that is rarely found in other performances of the 12th century,

or even those of the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries. This poet at least has known how to avoid prolixity, the chief fault of nearly all the dramatic writers of the Middle Ages. He has handled the temptation with true delicacy.

Another phase of the theatre of the Middle Ages which is rather significant is the zeal showed for the"mise en scène" and the playing of the actors. Various evidences of this have come down to us in the form of stage directions on manuscripts etcetera. The following directions have to do with the "Mystère d' Adam".

> "Let Paradise be established in an elevated place. Let there be arranged around it draperies and tapestries of silk at such a height as to allow the head and shoulders of the persons who will be in Paradise appear. Fragrant flowers and foliage will be seen there. Divers trees will be found there from which hand fruits, so that the place may appear very pleasant. Then when the Savior arrives, dressed in a tunic, before Him Adam and Eve will place themselves; Adam in a red tunic, Eve in white and with a white silk veil; both will be standing before the Figure (God), Adam the nearer, his face in repose, Eve a little farther back. Let Adam be well instructed to answer, in order that he be niether too prompt nor too slow in doingit. Let not only him, but all the persons be taught to speak sedately, and to make the proper gestures for the things they say; that they may neither add nor cut out a single syllable in the measure of the verses, but that all pronounce distinctly, and that all that is to be said, be said in the proper order."

As the drama developed, it gradually detached itself from the "office du jour", and became more and more profane. This was to be expected, as the people of the Middle Ages were, on the whole, coarse and vulgar. As the influence of the Church on the theatre lessened, the use of Latin as the language of the stage tended to disappear, and it was not long before the vulgar language was the only medium of speech on the secular stage. Latin continued to be

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employed in the liturgical drama, which existed throughout the Middle Ages, but with that we need no longer occupy ourselves.

It may be well to point out here the great difference between the stage of the Middle Ages and the stage of today. In the earlier theatre, the action instead of being successive was simultaneous. The stage, as a rule, about 100 feet by 150, was an image of the world, and showed all parts where there was action in the play. The localities consisted of several light structures (mansions) open to the view of the spectators. In these structures, the actors were obliged to stay throughout the play and spoke when their turn came. The stage on account of its great size might contain as many as thirty "mansions". At either end of the stage were Heaven and Hell. In one manuscript of a later date, there were nine places in juxtaposition: Paradise, a hall, Nazareth, the Temple, Paradise, the house of the Bishops, the Golden Gate, the sea, Hell. In the "Nativité", played at Rouen, there were twenty-two different places between Paradise and Hell. Heaven was usually a platform upon which God and the saints in pontifical costume appeared, amid flowers and silken draperies. Hell was a huge dragon's head, with a mouth which opened and closed by means of a mechanism. The mouth gave passage to the devils. Truly remarkable was the ingenious art exhibited in the mechanical effects. Everything was foreseen, even the sudden lights by which the heads of the angels were to be illuminated when they appeared. In "La Chronique du Mystère de Valenciennes", 1545, (Bibliothèque Nationale), we find this interesting account:

> "Les secrets de Paradis et de l'Enfer étoient tout à fait prodigieux et capables d'être pris par la populace pour des enchantements, car

> l'on voyoit la Vérité, les Anges, et divers autres personnages descendre de bien haut tantôt visiblement, autrefois comme invisibles, puis paroître tout à coup. De l'Enfer, Lucifer s'élevoit sans qu'on vit comment porté par un Fragon. La baguette de Moïse, de sèche et de stérile jettoit tout à coup des fleurs et des fruits. Les âmes de Hérodes et de Judas étoient emportées en l'air par les Diables: les Diables chassés des corps, les hydropiques et autres malades guéris, le tout d'une facon admirable.
>
> "Icy Jesus-Christ estoit eslevé du Dyable, qui rampoit le long d'une muraille plus de quarante pieds de haut; la, il se rendoit invisible; ailleurs, il se transfiguroit surla montagne du Thabor.
>
> "On vit l'eau changée en vin, maus si mystérieusement qu'on ne le pouvoit croire; et plus de cent personnes de l'auditoire voulurent goûter de ce vin. Les cinq pains et les deux poissons y furent semblablement multipliés et distribués à plus de mille personnes, nonobstant quoy il y en eut douze corbeilles de reste. Le figuier maudit par notre Seigneur fut sèché, et les feuilles flétries en un instant.
>
> "L'éclipse, le terre-tremble, le brisement des pierres et les autres miracles advenus à la mort de notre Seigneur furent représentés avec des nouveaux miracles. "

The increasingly profane character of the dramatic genre was evidenced in the "Jeu de Saint Nicolas" by Jean Bodel, which was played in Arras, in the last third of the 12th century. Instead of being presented within the church, the "Jeu de Saint Nicolas" was given in the public squares of the city. Perhaps as a consequence of its removal from the church, perhaps as a reason for it, vulgarities cropped out in the play which would never have been countenanced in the church. The plot is based on an old legend by Hilaire, but is treated so differently as to be hardly recognized in its newer form. The scene is laid in pagan land. The Christian army has just been defeated in battle and one man alone survives who is showed praying to Saint Nicolas. The king of

of the pagans is amazed and desires to see more of the power of this saint. He is credulous, and publishes broadcast the fact that henceforth his treasures will not be locked up. Three thieves with picturesque names, Pincedés, Cliquet and Rasoir, steal his treasures; the king decides to take vengeance on the Christian, and orders his head cut off. The saint appears in the nick of time, forces the thieves to restore the treasure. The king is converted. The verve, gayety and color of the drinkers' conversation, of dice games and of the tavern keepers are indescribable.

The "Jeu de Saint Nicolas" brought to a close the period of invention for the theatre of the Middle Ages. There is little reason to doubt that the comic theatre of the Middle Ages in France owes nothing to antiquity. It seems equally certain that there was no theatre during the Carolingian or Merovingian dynasties. With the dramatic tradition interrupted, the comedy of the Middle Ages was created spontaneously. A few adaptations of Plautus and Terence were played in the monasteries in Latin, but the first comedy in Latin played before a public audience was presented early in the 16th century at Metz. The spectators, not understanding the language, thought that they were being ridiculed, and threatened to beat the actors.

There was, however, one link connecting the ancient players with the players of the Middle Ages. This link was the jongleurs. It is very questionable whether the jongleurs can be seriously considered in connection with the growth and development of the French theatre, but as some, at least, of the jongleurs did probably play crude farces, it may be well to devote a little time to a consideration of their merits. The jongleurs were the direct descendants of the histriones of Rome. Bearers of numerous names, they came down

through a dozen centuries without materially altering their habits. As long as they were in existence they were the objects of attacks by royalty and clergy, but for a long time they were so popular with the common people that they found protection at the hands of their very enemies.

Were the jongleurs simply clowns, or did they in their repertory present something, in part, at least, dramatic? All the jongleurs were by no means mere clowns or acrobats. They might be divided into three categories: first, "les danseurs", who in the nude, danced and made indecent gestures; second, "les satiriques", who went from chateau to chateau, delivering attacks and heaping up insults on men of high rank (nobles and clergy); third, "les chanteurs", who sang coarse songs, accompanying themselves on instruments, in low taverns to licentious audiences; and fourth, "les chanteurs de gestes", the most respectable, who sang of the deeds of princes and lives of saints. Of these, only the "satirique" had anything of the comedian in him.

The jongleurs had no regular theatre, but it is fairly certain that they played crude farces, which were mostly pantomime. In these farces the chief aim of the jongleur was probably to cause laughter by appealing to the lower senses of the audience. There is little trace of their theatre, because their farces were doubtless largely improvised and rarely written. Their repertory was principally made up of dits (tales), debates, disputes, and jeux-partis (dialogues regular in metre, in which two poets answered and contradicted each other). The best known work in their repertory was the "Dit de l'Erberie", composed about 1260 by the same Rutebeuf who wrote "Le Miracle de Théophile". It can hardly be said to belong to the dramatic genre, for it lacks one essential element - action. In fact, when it was written it is doubtful

whether Rutebeuf ever intended it to be played. At best it is but a clever imitation of the humbug speeches of a charlatan. It is written in lyric form, and closes with an epilogue in prose. This fact would rather go to prove its lack of dramatic qualities; prose was unknown on the French stage up to the latter part of the 16th century. The debates, disputes and jeux-partis are equally devoid of action, and, being mainly written in lyric verse, would in the long run have been very tiresome to the audience. Before the end of the 14th century the jongleurs had given up all claim to a theatre and had reverted to mere acrobatics.

The Dramatic Societies.

The 13th century, while offering little in the way of dramatic production, was nevertheless notable for the reason that it gave to us the first dramatic societies, those societies which were to be so prominent in the French theatre until late in the 16th century.

It was in the 13th century that the Puys came into existence. The Puys have often been called the Academy of the Middle Ages. Their formation was the ultimate result of a great communal movement which started about the end of the eleventh century, and finished two centuries later. This revolution was an organization of the long oppressed bourgeois for political and municipal liberty. The bourgeois united to lighten their burdens, and to limit their own duties and the rights of the nobility. This revolution had far-reaching effects. Instead of contenting themselves with political associations, the bourgeois decided to do everything in the same way, and, before long, not only were corporations formed to control exclusively commerce and industry, but societies were created for the cultivation of poetry and music. These societies

soon became of great importance throughout the north and northwest of France. The leading Puys were at Abbeville, Amiens, Arras, Beauvais, Bethune, Caen, Cambrai, Dieppe, Douai, Evereux, Lille, Rousen and Valenciennes. Poets read their poems, mostly religious, before the "prince" of the Puy and the judges who were seated on the puy, or platform.

In the beginning the Church had been the only possessor of a theatre. This was inevitable since the dramatic genre required a complicated equipment which the Church alone possessed. In the 13th century, with the institution of the Puys, the development of the profane theatre and the secularizing of the religious plays, this condition ceased to exist.

The Puys presented both religious and profane drama. When miracles were played, they were regularly accompanied by short sermons in prose, usually delivered by an actor, but sometimes by a real preacher. They were always followed by a genre, called the "serventois", peculiar to the Puy. Although original with the Puy, where they were offered in competition for prizes, the "serventois" were later added to the repertory of other actors. The "serventois" were short satirical or religious plays with regular couplets.

The only manuscript in the genre of religious dramatic poetry that has come down to us is Rutebeuf's "Le Miracle de Théophile". "Le Miracle de Théophile" was the first of many miracle plays written to the honor and glory of the Virgin. The adoration of the Virgin in the Middle Ages is well known. As a consequence of the glorification of the Virgin, a number of pious or serious confréries were established in her honor. Some of the best of these confréries were the Puys. It is not at all unlikely that a Puy first presented "Le Miracle de Théophile". While we know of only this miracle play in the 13th century, there is no reason to doubt that

several others at least were in existence at the time. The miracle plays formed a genre which is quite different from those we have previously mentioned. As the Church has been forsaken, we naturally find the miracle play less serious, less religious, than the old liturgical drama, but more serious than the "Jeu de saint Nicolas" and the mysteries of the later centuries.

"Le Miracle de Théophile" was based on a widely known Cilician legend, in which a certain priest, named Theophilus, to regain his lost position, appealed to the devil and finally made a pact with him, selling his soul for a return to power. A short time later, penitent, he called upon the Virgin to save him. The latter, interceding with Christ, obtained his pardon. Theophilus then publicly confessed his sin. Cleansed of this iniquity, he died a few days later. In Rutebeuf's play, the despair of Theophile when he realizes he has betrayed his God, is touching. "Les Quarante Miracles", played in a Puy in the 14th century, are of less value as is "Le Miracle de Théophile". They consist of nothing but distinct scenes with no connection between them. No effort has been made to make the characters true to life. In addition, they first lacked what the "Miracle de Théophile" possessed,- in part at least, - real poetry. Their only value lies in the fact that they show us the condition of moral disorder in which the France of the Middle Ages found itself. The coarseness and gross immorality found in the miracle plays (the last place in the world one would expect to find them) are appalling. The Virgin is called upon to save from Hell sinners who have committed unspeakable sins, upon a mere word of repentance.

The chief offering of the Puys in the profane theatre was the "Jeu de la Feuillée" by Adam de la Halle, "a trouvère". It was com-

posed early in the second half of the 13th century, and was presented at Arras, but it is extremely doubtful whether it was given publicly, since it was filled with bitter and aggressive personalities. The characters were Adam de la Halle himself, his father, five bourgeois under their own names, a physician, an errant monk, a fool, a tavern keeper and three fairies. In one part Adam asks his father for money to defray his expenses to Paris. The father replies that the son will get along without the money, and adds that he himself is poor, old and sick. Adam then tells his father that the sickness is avarice, and that there are two thousand like him in Arras, whereupon he names a dozen or more of them. Thus the play continues with direct, unconcealed attacks on the weaknesses of prominent men of Arras. The play is highly dramatic.

The "Jeu de Robin et de Marion", also by Adam de la Halle, has been called the first French comic opera. It was first performed before Charles d'Anjou. Although in places it is very charming and clever, in the main it is characteristic of the Middle Ages, very coarse. Marion, faithful to Robert, repulses the advances of the knight who has defeated her husband. This main theme is perhaps less important than the description of village life which is portrayed throughout. We find ourselves in the midst of the joyous companions of Robert and Marion indulging in their humble food and coarse jests. There is no doubt that these two contributions of Adam de la Halle are worthy of note. While there are crudities, especially in "Le Jeu de la Feuillée" which preceded "Le Jeu de Robin et de Marion" by twenty years, and coarseness and licentiousness, which is inevitable, there is on the other hand a good deal of real poetry, vigor and tenderness. Furthermore we get a true picture of a commune in Picardy, its human nature with all its foibles and its strong

points.

Many attempts have been made to prove that the origin of the comic theatre, as well as of the serious theatre, was to be found in the Church. The liturgy by falling into the hands of the laymen had become the miracle play, and later the mystère. On the other hand, by thrusting from its midst the Fête des Fous, did not the Church lay the foundation for the farce? But this hypothesis, says Petit de Julleville, must be dismissed. The farce is a picture of trivial scenes of every day life, a picture whose features are enlarged even to the extent of caricature, but whose intention is always to copy reality by exaggerating it, in order to render it more obvious. There was nothing of this in the Fête des Fous. Even less similarity exists between the Fête des Fous and the morality. The morality aimed to instruct; at the same time it pleased, and thus embodied the characteristics of the comic theatre, in its form, and the serious theatre, in its aim. The Fête des Fous had no such aim.

Why then discuss the Fête des Fous? Because the Fête des Fous did give rise to the sottie. The principle of the former was to parody the ecclesiastic hierarchy, to turn the world topsy-turvy, to put down the great men and to raise men of lesser importance. At the end of the Fête des Fous it was the custom to sing over the "Deposuit potentes de sede et exaltavit humiles". This same idea of parody and of upsetting the established hierarchy was found in the sottie, a peculiarly French genre of the comedy. Both were essentially masquerades. The sottie was played by sots. Sot meant fou (fool). Whether under the name of 'sot' or 'fou', he symbolized man in general and the great man in particular, possessed of stupidity and vices which, they argue, are at the bottom of all instincts. In turn, the 'sot' represented king, judge, pope, bishop,

priest, noble, merchant, but in all, his qualities as sot are easily recognizable. The Fête des Fous gave birth to still another comic genre of less importance - the sermon joyeux. The sermon joyeux was a burlesque on the real sermon, its text, its Latin quotations and its magisterial conclusions. Had the idea of this parody first been presented on the stage, it would have lost its point. The first "sermon joyeux" was delivered in a real church, in a real pulpit, as a form of pleasantry by a group of fun-loving sacristans. In their ridicule of the churchmen, they often gave them such names as Hypocrisie, Feintise and Faux-Semblant.

Without mention of "L'Histoire de Griselidis", a discussion of the dramatic works of the 14th century would be incomplete. This delightful play, despite its misleading name, was a real mystery, although it was probably modeled after the 14th century miracle play.

From the point of view of enthusiasm of actors and audience, the 15th century was the golden era of the middle ages. The peace which followed the 100 Years' War (ended in 1453), and preceded the religious wars, was of the greatest advantage to the cause of the theatre. Perfidious and shrewd Louis XI had arrogated to himself virtually absolute powers, and with these powers he granted protection to the long oppressed bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie with less to worry about and much wealthier than ever before gave themselves over to their passion for the theatre. Throughout France rude stages were erected for all sorts of serious and comic performances. For such a public, vulgar and coarse as it was, the most popular amusement for the mind was the theatre. It was in this century that were developed to their highest state the various societies Confréries de la Passion, Les Basochiens, Enfants-sans-Souci(etcet.)

founded in the 14th century.

First and perhaps foremost among the associations formed for dramatic purposes were the sociétés sérieuses or sociétés pieuses. Most of these were called Confréries de la Passion, and replaced the Puys all over northern France. The repertory of the Confréries consisted of miracle plays, mystères, which gradually took the place of the miracle, and lives of saints, which the confréries presented in honor of a certain patron saint, thinking thereby to gain his favor and protection. In their zeal, they sought out poets, ordered, paid for and presented their plays. The Confrérie des Cordonniers, for example, in 1443 and 1449, presented a mystery of the lives of Saint Crespin and Saint Crespinien, their patrons, and the Confrérie des maçons et charpentiers de Paris ordered from the celebrated Gringore a long "vie de Monseigneur Saint Loys, roy de France", to be played before the king.

By far the most famous of the confréries was the Confrérie de la Passion of Paris. For a number of years this association like the others had obstacles to overcome in the shape of civil authorities. As early as June 3, 1398, an ordinance of the provost of Paris forbade a Paris association playing on the village of Saint-Maur-les-Fossés, in the suburbs.

> "Nous deffendons, de par le Roy, nostre Sire, a tous les manuens et habitans en la ville de Paris, de Saint-Mor et autres villes de autour Paris, que ilz ne facent ne se esbatent aucuns jeux de personages par manière de farces, de vies de sains, ne autrement, sans le congié du dit seigneur ou de nous, et sur peine de encourie en indignacion du roy et de soi fourfaire envers luy."

However in those days things were not as bad as they seemed. By appealing to the king, they were granted powers over the head of the provost. As there was no centralized power or proper dis-

delegation of authority, a society by opposing one to another, could easily obtain all it desired. Strange as it may seem, the chief opposition to the Confrérie de la Passion, when it announced it would play "Le Mystère de la Passion", was on the grounds that it was to be a permanent theatre. In 1402, King Charles VI officially recognized the Confrérie de la Passion and granted it such privileges as were accorded no other society. The Confrérie thereby established the first permanent theatre in France. The location granted for this theatre was the Hôtel de la Trinité. For a long time, encouraged by the approbation of the public, the Confrérie played mystères exclusively. About the middle of the 15th century, however, it became apparent that the public was tiring of the mystères, and the Confréres, fearing to lose their privileges, invited the Basochiens and Enfants-sans-Souci to share the Hôtel de la Trinité with them, thus alternating the serious with the comic. The Prince des Sots, chief of the Enfants-sans-Souci was already in possession of the right to perform all kinds of comic plays. Each organization functioned independently of the other, and the only arrangement was an amicable one to share the Hôtel de la Trinité.

It was during the 14th century that the original phase of the mystery came to light, the "mystère mimé". These were open air exhibitions to celebrate the arrival in Paris of some royal personage. The regular mystery was a development of the miracle play and the Mystère mimé" . The "mystère mimé" or "jeu de mystère" was a performance with pantomime and without dramatic dialogue, the subjects of which were Christian, mythological or allegorical. The source of the mystery which developed therefrom was almost always religious. Only two are known which vary from this generalization: "Le Mystère du Siège d'Orléans", written and presented not long after

Joan of Arc's deliverance of that city, and the "Destruction de Troye", which may never have been played. Profane mysteries appeared only after the virtual downfall of the Confrères. Probably the most common source of the mysteries of the 15th and 16th centuries was the liturgical drama "Les Prophètes du Christ". This one drama must have given rise to scores of mystery plays. Subjects were found for the mysteries in religious history from the Creation to the time of St. Louis. Most poets took a particular event in the great field and founded their mystery upon it. Three long mysteries of more general character than these were "Le Mystère de la Passion" by Arnoul Gréban, which contained in 35,000 verses all the stories of the Gospel; "Le Mystère du Vieil Testament", which in 50,000 verses reached from the time of the paradise on earth to Augustus; and "Les Mystères des Actes des Apôtres", by Arnoul Gréban and his brother, which in 60,000 verses explained the spread of the Christian religion and the martyrdom of the first followers of Christ. As one may readily conceive from the magnitude of the mysteries, there was not the slightest trace of unity. Even the shortest mysteries obeyed no laws of unity.

To a modern reader the spirit of the mysteries seems profane. They were a reflection of the times in which the poets lived. As a matter of fact, the mysteries were the product of a serious and pious intention. Besides being given in honor of a patron saint, they were often presented as a plea to God or as thanks for some blessing.

Who were the actors in the mystery plays? The actors came from all walks of life; there were nobles, bourgeois, lawyers, priests (especially in the productions of temporary associations) and common people. Several months before the performance of a

mystère, a cry (a proclamation made throughout the countryside) was made to call for volunteer actors and to announce the play. For the larger plays this cry was necessary, since for certain long mysteries like the "Mystère des Actes des Apôtres", five hundred actors had to be chosen to take the roles. The performance itself lasted forty days. Volunteers were never lacking, and rehearsals were soon well under way. The actors were without exception enthusiastic over their parts, sometimes too enthusiastic. It is reported that in one passion play, the guard who was supposed to bury his lance in the side of the crucified Christ, was so full of ardor and rage, that he mortally wounded the poor actor on the cross, who fell and seriously injured the Holy Virgin who was praying at the foot of the crucifix. For the most part, actors had to furnish their own costumes, but in exceptional cases, these were given them by the rich. Many of the actors like amateur actors of today, were exceedingly proud of their costumes. This story is told of one actor who had the part of a devil in a mystery.

> "Aucuns jouèrent certains actes ou comedies esquelles l'un d'entre le peuple représenta et joua le personnage d'un diable avec des habits hideux et espouvantables; et quand les jeux furent achevez, il s'en retourna en sa maison". Then he kept "son accoustrement de diable", at least long enough so that his wife, "ayant en imagination ce que la figure et l'habit, duquel son mary estoit vêtu, représentoit . . . vint à enfanter un enfant semblable à la figure du diable."

All was not pleasant in those days in the life of an actor. Rigorous obligations were imposed upon the players to prevent them from being tardy at rehearsals, etc. In addition the leading roles demanded an enormous amount of work and ardor. In certain of the passion plays, Christ had to speak more than 4000 verses - what a test of memory! - and besides, had to remain upon the cross

as long as Christ did in reality. Of Curé Nicolle, who played the rôle of Christ in Metz, it is said:

> "Il cuyda mourir en l'arbre de la croix, car le coeur lui faillit, tellement qu'il fust esté mort s'il ne fust esté secouru. Et convint qu'un autre prestre fust mis en son lieu pour parffire le personnage de Dieu et estoit celui prestre alors l'un des bourreaux et tyrans dudit jeu . . . En icelui jeu y eut encote un autre prestre qui s'appeloit seigneur Jehan de Missey, lequel portoit le personage de Judas, mais pour ce qu'il pendit trop longtemps, il fut pareillement transi et quasi mort; car le cueur lui faillit, par quoi il fut bien hastivement dependu et fut emporté en aucun lieu prochain pour le frotter de vinaigre et autre chose pour le reconforter" (Huguenin - Chroniques de Metz)

The actors however considered their hardships and their work well rewarded when the time came for their "montre". A day or two before the regular performance of the mystery, all the actors from the highest to the lowest, assembled for a parade in full costume. They might then well be proud of themselves as they marched past crowds of admiring spectators. These"montres" were often preceded by the mayor, échevins and city officials, drums, fifes and trumpets. In the final performance the actors had all the fire and ardor one could wish.

Up to the time of the Renaissance, no care had ever been taken either to put local color into the performance or to see that costumes were of the right period. The first trace of any desire for fidelity to fact is found in the "Epitres Familières de Jean Bouchet" in 1535, but a very short time before the decline of the mysteries. In writing to the confrères at Issoudun who were about to put on the Passion, he said,

> "Je vous supply que tous voz personnages
> Vous assignez a gens selon leurs aages

Et que n'usez tant d'habitz empruntez
(Fussent-ils d'or) qu'ilz ne soient adjustez
Commodement aux gens selon leurs soolles.
Il n'est pas beau que les docteurs d'escolles,
Pharisiens, et les gens de conseil
Ayent vestement a Pilate pareil."

As we have already said, the Confrères, when face to face with an opposition to their mystères had always extricated themselves from any difficulty by appealing to another source of authority. But this statagem was no longer to avail them. From about 1548, the opposition to the performance of mysteries in general, and to the Confrèrie de la Passion in particular, was united. This change in sentiment had come out of the Reform Movement and the Renaissance, which had caused the more intelligent to despise the crudities, coarseness and immorality of the theatre of the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, in 1541, the Confrères had met with great success in their presentation of the Actes des Apôtres, the performance having lasted from Easter to All Saint's Day. Thinking to float along on this wave of success, they announced for the following year Le Mystère du Vieil Testament. Keen opposition was forthcoming from the Parlement de Paris and the Procureur Général. The passages which follow taken from the Procureur Général's petition to the king, show to what extent the authorities had tired of the coarseness and lasciviousness of the plays and of the ignorance of the players.

"Tant les entrepreneurs que les joueurs sont gens ignares, artisans mecaniques, ne sachant ni A ni B, qui oncques ne furent instruictz ni exercez en theatres et lieux publics a faire telz actes, et davantage n'ont langue diserte ni langage propre ni les accents de prononciation decente, ni aulcune intelligence de ce qu' ils dient; tellement que le plus souvent advient que d'un mot ils en font trois; font point ou pause au milieu d'une proposition, sens ou oraison imparfaite; font

d'un interrogatif un admirant, ou autre geste, prolation ou accent contraires à ce qu'ils dient, dont souvent advient derision et clameur publicque dedans le theatre mesme, tellement qu'au lieu de tourner à edification leur jeu tourne à scandale et derision." Then follows a bitter arraignment of the poor actors of the Actes des Apôtres. "Ces gens non lettrez ni entenduz en telles affaires, de condition infame, comme un menuisier, un sergent à verge, un tapissier, un vendeur de poisson qui ont fait jouer les "Actes des Apôtres" et qui ajoutant, pour les allonger, plusieurs choses apocryphes et entremettant à la fin ou au commencement du jeu farces lascives et momeries, ont fait durer leur jeu l'espace de six à sept mois, d'ou sont advenues et adviennent cessation de service divin; refroidissement de charitez, et d'aumones adulteres,et fornications infinies, scandales, derisions et moqueries" These last charges, if not an exaggeration, would certainly be sufficient reason to drive such actors from the stage. "Tant que les dicts jeux ont duré le commun peuple, dès huit à neuf heures du matin, ès jours de festes, delaissoit sa messe paroisiale, sermons et vespres, pour aller ès ditz jeux garder sa place et y estre jusqu'à cinq heures du soir; ont cessé les predications, car n'eussent eu les predicateurs qui les eussent escoutez. Et retournant desditz jeux se mocquoient hautement et publicquement par les rues desdictz jeux des joueurs contrefaisant quelque langage impropre qu'ilz avaient oi desdictz jeux, ou autre chose mal faite, criant par derision que le Sainct-Esprit n'avoit point voulu descendre, et autres mocqueries. Et le plus souvent les prestres des paroisses pour avoir leur passe temps d'allerès ditz jeux, ont delaissé dire vespres, ou les ont dictes tout seuls dès L'heure de midy, heure non accoustumée; et mesme les chantres et chapelains de la saincte chapelle de ce palais, tant que les dictz jeux ont duré, ont dict vespres les jours de feste à l'heure de midy, et encore les disoyent en poste et à la legère pour aller ès dictz jeux".

The Catholic clergy was opposed to the mystères on the ground that they initiated the people into the Bible (and the mysteries could hardly be called a proper initiation). The Protestants were no less hostile because the mystères mixed legend with the Bible. In spite of the petition of the Procureur Général and the strong

protest from both Catholics and Protestants, Francis I granted the Confrères the privilege of playing "Le Mystère du Vieil Testament" on certain conditions. These conditions were that there should be interpolated nothing profane, lascivious or ridiculous (this last because it had grown to be the custom for the Confréries joyeuses, such as the Enfants-sans-Souci, to furnish fools and devils for the serious genre) that the admission should not be greater than two cents, that boxes should not cost more than 30 écus, that the performance should begin at one and end at five, that there should be no scandal or tumult, and that, inasmuch as the mystery was attracting men and women from church, the Confrères should pay one thousand livres to the poor.

No dictum of the king could prevent the inevitable decline of the mystery and the Confrérie de la Passion. The following year Francis I himself, ordered the Hôtel de Flandres to be torn down, and until 1548, the Confrères were without a permanent theatre. On August 30 of that year, they acquired a part of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, and thereupon requested from Parlement authorization to resume their repertory. They encountered two opponents, literary prejudice and religious scruples. In the second quarter of the 16th century the Renaissance and the Reform had exerted a singular influence on the public mind. With a better knowledge of ancient literatures, of the culture of the past races, the repertory of the middle ages, mysteries, miracles, farces, and sotties, seemed coarse to the minds which now wanted nothing which did not smack of Greek or Latin. So much for the literary prejudice. The Reform had worked a like change of sentiment in both Protestant and Catholic, as we have just seen. They were both scandalized at the revolting idea of the mystery mixed with the burlesque. The literary scruple had little effect upon

Parlement, but, appreciating the danger to religion of performing a sacred play on a profane stage, they issued the celebrated declaration of December 17, 1548, which forbade the Confrères ever to play again the "Mystère de la Passion". They were still permitted to play profane mysteries. To eliminate from the repertory of the Confrères religious mystery plays was to deal it a death blow. With the edict of 1548, the religious theatre of the Middle Ages expired. Trying to fight off their fate, the Confrères held on for half a century, with mysteries drawn from chansons de geste, but they faced another enemy - indifference, and the rivalry of younger troupes. We still find the Confrérie de La Passion possessed of all its former privileges, except that of playing sacred mystères, as late as the early part of the 17th century. By a special edict, Louis XIV declared in December, 1676, that the association had ceased to exist.

The Confrérie de la Passion in its two hundred years of existence, with its vast opportunities for marking great progress in the history of the French theatre, never contributed a single idea which would tend to perfect the dramatic art; they left the theatre - let us be charitable - just as they found it. By bringing the immense stage of the public square into a closed hall, being thereby forced to squeeze within a much smaller area their production, and to limit the number of places in which dramatic action was scattered, they unconsciously prepared for the triumph of the unities. Since the Confrérie had not known how to elevate their theatre, they had depended upon clownish realism and faith in an ignorant public.

It would be unfair to pass from the serious to the comic genre without mentioning the temporary associations which almost

without exception were the producers of the most spectacular performances of the mysteries and moralities of the 15th and 16th centuries. These temporary associations were made up of men who were interested in the project of putting on one production, and who disbanded immediately after the performance. The performance of a mystery was organized exactly like an industrial enterprise, and the actors were the stockholders. A group of men would get together and make oath that they would defray the expenses of the mystery, cost of costumes etcetera, and each stockholder would share the profits or losses according to the amount he had contributed. At Valenciennes in 1547, the arrangement was very elaborate; the stockholders chose thirteen "surintendants" to maintain peace and order. Each was to be personally responsible for some phase of the enterprise - construction, mise en scène, music, mechanical devices, etc. Three "originateurs" adapted the text to presentation, and distributed the rôles. Eleven boys and girls took part. Certain regulations were made; all players were to appear upon order of the "surintendant"; they must accept the rôles assigned them; they must be pr esent at all rehearsals. A three cent fine was charged to all delinquents. Rehearsal on the day of the show was at seven in the morning. Failure to appear on time was cause for a fine of six cents. A player not present at the beginning of the show was punishable by a fine of ten cents. Similar fines were imposed for grumbling against the "surintendants", for leaving the theatre without permission, for drinking during rehearsals.

It is through the temporary associations that we first hear of the presence of women on the stage of the Middle Ages, for no women belonged to the sociétés sérieuses or joyeuses. Up to the middle of the 16th century, only three women are known to have

appeared in dramatic productions. In the earlier days of the theatre, it had been considered unwomanly to take part even in the mysteries, and women's rôles had been taken by beardless young men with as soft voices as could be found. In 1468, at Metz, the "Jeu de sainte Catherine de Sienne" was played, and the title rôle was taken by an eighteen year old girl who recited more than two thousand verses. In 1537, at Grenoble, in "Le mystère de la Passion", Francoise Buatier played very acceptable the role of Christ's mother. At Valenciennes in 1547, five young ladies took the parts of the Virgin and the temple girls. Before custom freely allowed women to appear upon the stage, it had made a partial concession in the early part of the 15th century, by permitting them to appear in mystères mimés.

Unlike the serious theatre, the comic theatre in France can boast of a continuous tradition. Between the decline of the mysteries and the rise of the modern tragedy, there was an interruption that did not occur in the comic genre. As in the serious theatre, professional actors did not appear until the 16th century, and most of the productions were given by organizations such as the Basochiens, the Enfants-sans-Souci and other sociétés joyeuses.

It was as early as 1303 that the clerks of the Parlement de Paris organized themselves into a society for their mutual protection and amusement. This was during the reign of Philippe le Bel who gave them the title of Royaume de la Basoche. This Basoche comprised solicitors' clerks, lawyers' clerks, recorders' clerks, and counselors' clerks. In its organization, it had its own king, chancelor, vice chancelor, maître des requêtes, referendary, grand audiencier, procureur général, and several other dignitaries. These officers had great powers, even going so far as to coin money to be used be-

tween the Basochiens and certain merchants. In addition to the Basoche du Parlement, there were two other Basoches, less important and very likely subordinate to the clerks just mentioned. One of these was the Basoche du Châtelet, composed of clerks of the Châtelet. It had its origin a quarter of a century before the great Basoche. The other was known as the Empire de Galilée, and comprised the clerks of solicitors of the Chamber of Accounts. This organization was of less importance than either of the other two. Outside of Paris, Aix , Avignon, Bordeaux, Chambéry, Chartres, Chaumont, Dijon, Grenoble, Issoudun, Loches, Lyon, Marseille, Moulins, Orleans, Poitiers, Reims, Toulouse, Tours, Verneuil and many other cities had their Basoche.

The Basochiens did not give plays from the outset. At first, they put on an annual 'montre' of all their members. The societies were divided into groups, each led by a captain. This sort of masquerade gave the Basochiens a taste for pomp in costumes and mise en scène. This in turn naturally caused the societies to mix comic plays with their processions to amuse the spectators. From once a year, the shows soon increased to three annually, in January, May and July. From the first the shows were a success. The King began to invite the Basochiens to give performances on the occasion of the arrival in Paris of royal personages. Their repertory was not limited to comic plays, but included also pantomimes and tableaux vivants. In their dramatic performances the Basochiens attacked everybody, but mainly the eccentricities and foibles of their own profession; judges, lawyers, solicitors and bailiffs. It is fairly certain that the farce of Patelin was written for presentation by the Basoche, for it is just the type of play they were accustomed to present. The development of comedy with the Basochiens

was in some way parallel to that of the "sermon joyeux". In a world which demanded to be amused, the Basochiens found ample basis in their own profession for constructing plays. The legal procedure with its dialogue full of human passions, vanity and vivacity, readily lent itself to dramatic performance. In their idle moments, members of the Basoche would compose imaginary debates, from which whole plays would gradually develop. The first real performance of the Basochiens were called "causes grasses" because they were given on the 'jours gras'. Their later repertory consisted of farces and moralities, and, by agreement with the Enfants-sans-Soui, they also played sotties. As we have already noted, the Confrères de la Passion invited the two organizations, about the middle of the 15th century, to share with them the Hôpital de la Trinité. The Basochiens like other dramatic organizations of the time, were often in conflict with the authorities, but by pleading to one from the decisions of the other, they managed to avoid much trouble. In turn they were forbidden, and ordered, to play. At one time under Charles VIII, they seemed to have resumed their performances with no prospect of interruption when one of their poets, Henri Baude, in a morality attacked the men who were ruling in the name of Charles VIII. He pictured the King as a fountain of pure water, to represent the purity of his intentions. The ruling powers were represented by rubbish and filth.

The Basochiens came back into full power during the reign of Louis XII. This reign was the most brilliant period in the Middle Ages as far as the theatre was concerned. Louis XII was so liberal that he not only sanctioned, but protected, the most daring plays on the stage, the political satire. His reason for this liberality might be summed up in his own words;

> "Je veux qu'on joue en liberté, et que les jeunes gens declairent les abus qu'on fait en ma Court, puisque les confesseurs et autres qui sont les sages, n'en veulent rien dire." He also "Se plaignoit que de son temps personne ne lui vouloit dire la verité; ce qui estoit cause qu'il ne pouvoit sçavoir comme son royaume estoit gouverné; et pour en sçavoir la verité, il permit les theatres libres; et voulut que sur iceux, on jouast librement les abus qui se commettoient, tant en sa cour comme en tout son royaume; pensant par la apprendre et sçavoir beaucoup de choses lesquelles autrement il lui estoit impossible d'entendre." 'Serées, de Guillaume Bouchet, second livre, treizième serée."

Louis XII even permitted the Basochiens to poke fun at his own weak points, especially his avarice, but when they began to jest at his wife, he made the very definite ruling that they should mention no lady in their performances.

With the accession to the throne of the pleasure-loving Francis I, the theatre received a decided setback. Although he at first protected the Basochiens, he turned against them when they alluded to his clandestine love affairs.

> "En ce temps lorsque le roy estoit à Paris, y eust un prestre qui se faisoit appeler Monsieur Cruche, grand fatiste (poète) lequel un peu devant, avec plusieurs autres, avoit joué publiquement, à la place Maubert, sur eschafaulx, certains jeux et moralitez; c'est assavoir sottye, sermon, moralité et farce; dont la moralité contenoyt les seigneurs qui portoient le drap d'or a credo; et emportoient leurs terres sur leurs espaules, avec autres choses morales et bonne remonstrations. Et à la farce fur le dit monsieur Cruche avec ses complices; qui avoit une lanterne par laquelle voyoit toutes choses; et entre autres, qu'il y avoit une poulle qui se nourrissoit sous une sallemande, laquelle poulle portoit sur elle une chose qui estoit assez pour faire mourir dix hommes. Laquelle chose estoit à interpreter que le roy aimoit et joissoit d'une femme de Paris, qui estoit fille d'un conseiller à la cour du Parlement, nommé monsieur Lecocq. Et icelle estoit mariée à un avocat en Parlement, très habille homme, nommé

monsieur Jacques Dishomme; qui avoit tout plein de biens dont le roy se saysit"
(Journal d'un Bourgeois de Paris, publié par M. Lalanne pour la Société de l'histoire de France)

It was in the 'jours gras' of 1548, that the Basochiens presented the only play that we know was in their repertory, a farce called "Le Cry de la Basoche". Less than half a century later, the Parisian Basoche had ceased to exist as a play producing organization, although they continued to be a judiciary corporation until the French Revolution.

The Basoches in the provinces were founded by Basochiens from Paris who often considered it advisable to leave the city rather than face possible prison sentences. Carrying with them their taste for amusement, they helped organize similar societies in the larger cities of France.

The Enfants-sans-Souci, or the Compagnons du Prince des Sots, as they were sometimes called, had their origin sometime during the 14th century, the exact date not being known. There is, however, reason to believe that the society was formed during the early years of the reign of Charles VI. There have been those who maintained that the members of the Enfants-sans-Souci were drawn from joy-loving, novelty-seeking youths of the better class. The leading authorities, such as Petit de Julleville, hold quite an opposite view, namely, that the members were the bohemians of the 14th and 15th centuries, the penniless fellows who united the better to enjoy the gayety and pleasures of a leisurely life.

The Enfants called themselves Sots, and their leader was the Prince des Sots, the second in command, the Mère-Sotte. Their real origin was doubtless the secularized Fête Des Fous, the

sacrilegious frolic banished from the Church. Their main aim was the same - parody; the object attacked was different, for whereas the Fous amused themselves at the expense of the ecclesiastic hierarchy, the Sots parodied society in general. The principal idea of the Sots was based on the assumption that the world is composed entirely of fools. Kings, judges, bishops, priests, nobles, bourgeois, common people, all were costumed differently, but all were equally fools. Altogether there was formed quite a complete organization. There may have been another reason for thus assuming the costume and characteristics of sots. It was a mask, which would permit the actors to say what they wanted about anything they chose; to tell the truth, even to the king himself. No counter attack would be forthcoming, for who would take seriously the words of a sot? As we have mentioned, fools were introduced at an early date in the mystery plays. They were borrowed for the most part from the Enfants-sans-Souci. Their rôles were no less licentious in the serious theatre than in the comic.

The sottie, instrument of the Sots, was a sort of 'parade', recited before the show to attract the spectators. It was not presented alone, but always accompanied by some other genre. As a general rule, no one kind of play was given at a performance. However, when temporary societies were organized to present a mystery, this mystery was usually unaccompanied. The Parfaict brothers in their Histoire du Théatre Français (Volume III, page 106) state that the Sots regularly put on three plays, a sottie, a morality and a farce; they cite three examples: "Jeu du Prince des Sots", the "Moralité de Mundus, " "Caro","Demonia," and the "Farce des deux Savetiers". Sometimes a monologue or a sermon joyeux was added to the program. The sottie was a genre for the professional

comedian. To be a good sot one had also to be a good acrobat and clown. The sottie was a peculiarly French genre, and unlike the other genres presented on the French stage, had little influence on the foreign stage. The Sots wore costumes which of course varied with the rank or porfession of the person represented, but all were alike in that they had the hood with donkey ears and bells. The predominant colors in the costumes were yellow and green, yellow for gayety, green for liberty, hope and youth. It is highly probable that their taste for the theatre came from the success with which the Basochiens had met. This is natural since many of the Enfants-sans-Souci were also Basochiens. This also accounts in large measure for the amicable relations between the two societies. As we have already seen, they had an arrangement whereby each might play the repertory of the other, and together they had accepted the invitation of the Confrères to play at the Hôtel de la Trinité. Inasmuch as no decrees were handed down to the Enfants-sans-Souci by the Parlement, and numerous were the warnings received by the Basoche, it is reasonable to assume that the Enfants-sans-Souci were subordinate to the Basoche and considered a part of it.

The leading Sots were Clément Marot, Pierre Gringore (or Gringoire) and Jean du Pont-Alais. Marot was in his youth a Sot and a Basochien. He was principally famous as a poet, and as a translator of the Psalms.

Gringore, chiefly known through Victor Hugo's "Notre Dame de Paris", and de Banville, neither a correct portrayal of him - wrote the most celebrated of all the sotties: "Prince des Sots", played for the first time in 1512 at the Halles of Paris on the occasion of thecarnival. Gringore is perhaps the most versatile figure in the theatre of the Middle Ages; he was author, playwight, actor,

theatrical dir ector, contractor for performances given on the arrival of royalty, politician and man of action, mingling in religious, diplomatic and military quarrels of the day. Toward the end of his life, strangely enough, he became a devout poet and spent most of his time composing orthodox verse for the Duke of Lorraine. In every way Gringore was a man of superior intellect, a genius, vastly above the level of Hugo's character. At the age of thirty-four, he became Mère-Sotte. He was exceedingly proud of his title, thereafter signing most of his works with it, for example, "Les Fantaisies de Mère-Sotte" and "Les Menus Propos de Mère-Sotte". Gringore wrote a mystery play for the corporation of masons and carpenters of Paris, "La Vie de Monseigneus Saint Joys, roy de France". His prestige was soon remarked by Louis XII who determined to profit by it. As a result Gringore was used by the king to mould public opinion just as newspapers are used today. He wrote "La chasse du Cerf des Cerfs" against Pope Julius II who was trying to drive the French from Italy. In the end, the pope appeared in the guise of Mère-Sotte. Among Gringore's other plays were "Le Prince des Sots" a sottie, and "L'Homme Obstiné, a morality, to arouse public opinion in favor of the policies of the king. The crowning of Francis I virtually marked the close of Gringore's public life. The new king's opposition to the theatre and Gringore's age changed the course of his career.

The last of the three great Sots, perhaps the greatest from a purely dramatic standpoint, if we but had the data about him, was Jean du Pont-Alais. He was younger than Gringore and took part when but a stripling in the latter's "Prince des Sots". Pont-Alais has the reputation of being the best actor of the French theatre of the Middle Ages. Later in life he became, like Gringore, a contractor for public performances given on the arrival of royalty.

The Enfants-sans-Souci were still popular as late as the middle of the 16th century, witness a song composed on the occasion of the coronation of Henry II:

"Princes et gentilz hommes
Venez diligemment,
Venez tous en personne,
A ce couronnement . . .
Vous verrez jouer farces
Dessus les establis
Badines et moralles
Des Enfans sans Soucy"
(Chansons nouvellement composées sur plusieurs chants, 1548. Réimpression de Baillieu)

They took part in a farce played before the court as late as 1559, but, mortally wounded by the Renaissance and the Reform, they succumbed - as far as the theatre is concerned - before the end of the 16th century. As an organization they lived until 1615.

While the Enfants-sans-Souci were busy with their repertory in Paris, the sociétés joyeuses were no less active in the provinces, presenting exhibitions of all sorts. The most famous of these was l'Infanterie Dijonnaise, or, as it is much better known, La Mère-Folle de Dijon. It was a burlesque society which flourished in Dijon during the 15th and 16th centuries. Like the Enfants-sans-Souci, La Mère-Folle originated in the Fête des Fous. The connection here was much closer than in the case of the Sots of Paris. The Fête des Fous had existed in the Dijon district up to the middle of the 15th century. The Council of Basle issued an anathema against it. All hope of retaining the Fête seemed gone when the fun-loving Philippe le Bon, duc de Bourgogne, solemnly confirmed its existence by a decree dated December 27, 1454. It is perhaps significant that the decree was tied with red, green and yellow braid.

"Voulons, consentons, accordons
Pour nous et pour nos successeurs,
Des lieux ci-dessus dits Seigneurs
Que ceste feste celebrée,
Soit à jamais, un jour l'année,
Le premier du mois de janvier,
Et que joyeux Fous, sans dangier,
De l'habit de nostre Chapelle,
Fassent la feste bonne et belle,
Sans outrage et derision;
Et n'y soit contradiction
Mise par aucun des plus sages;
Mais la feront les Fous volages,
Doucement, tant qu'argent leur dure,
Un jour ou deux, Car chose dure
Seroit de plus continuer,
Ni les frais plus avant bouter;
Par leurs finances qui decroissent,
Lorsque leurs depenses accroissent.
Si mandons à tous nos sujets
Qu'en en ne soyent empeschés;
Mais les en souffrent tous jouir
Paisiblement à leur plaisir."

This decree marked the real foundation of Mère-Folle. By the latter half of the 15th century, the Mère-Folle was an institution. Dijon now had its Parlement, and its Chamber of Accounts. With the greatly increased number of clerks, and with the example of Paris to follow, there was a general demand for a Basoche, but the clerks found full satisfaction in the Mère-Folle which had hitherto been composed mostly of bourgeois. Mère-Folle, despite the name, was a man. Like the Prince des Sots at Paris, he had almost unlimited powers over his subjects. Next below him came Procureur Fiscal, or Fiscal Vert, or Griffon Vert, whose duty it was to convoke the members, collect taxes and examine candidates for membership. Other officers were chancelor, grand écuyer, officier de justice. Each candidate was compelled to answer in verse the questions of the examiner. If received as a member, he was given a red, green and yellow hood. Several times a year, the Mère-Folle held 'montrees,' closely resembling the 'montres' of the Enfants-sans-Souci, but

rather more elaborate.

The Mère-Folle pretended to wish to correct bad morals. If anyone committed a misdemeanor, he was seized upon by Mèrre-Folle, and made the butt of merciless public ridicule. Without being named, his voice, gestures and other characteristics were imitated. Of the repertory of Mère-Folle there remains but one play, "Le Jeu de Maitre du Tillet". All would have gone well with the Infanterie Dijonnaise, had the society not foolishly mixed itself up in political affairs. Even so, it maintained its existence until 1630, when, after a too bold political attack on a new system of taxation imposed by Louis XII, it was the object of this edict:

> "Considerant les plaintes qui nous ont été faites de la coûtume scandaleuse observée en ladite ville de Dijon d'une Assemblée d'Infanterie et Mère-Folie, qui est vraiment une mère (pure) et pure folie, des désordres et débauches qu'elle a produits, et produit encore ordinairement contreles bonnes moeurs, repos et tranqullité de la ville, avec mauvais exemples; voulant déracinerce mal et empêcher qu'il ne renaisse si vite à l'avanir, nous avons de notre pleine puissance et autorité royale, abrogé, révoqué et aboli, et parces présentes, signées de notre main, abrogeons, réroquons et abolissons ladite compagnie de l'Infanterie et Mère-Folle; defendons à tous nos sujets de ladite ville et autres de s'assembler ci-après; s'enrôler et s'associer, sous le nom d'Infanterie ou Mère-Folle, ni faire ensemble festins pur ce sujet, à peine d'être déclarés indignes de toutes charges de ville, dont a present nous les avons déclarés indignes et incapables d'y être jamais appelés; et outre ce, à peine d'être punis comme perturbateurs du repos public".

For thirty years Mère-Folle survived by completely reforming its habits. All that can be said of it during that period is that it was harmless. This nominal existence was brought to a close by an order from Louis XIV in 1661.

There were a hundred other sociètès joyeuses similar to the

Mère-Folle of Dijon, although none was so famous. Their repertory was almost entirely composed of sotties with occasional farces and moralities. The leading societies were in Amiens, Beauvais (Les Homeurs du Pont-Pinard), Béthune, Cambrai, Chalon-sur-Saône, Chaumont (notorious for its devils, who for months before a performance scoured the country, ostensibly to announce the sottie, but really to rob and plunder), Clermont, Laon, Lyon, and Rouen (Les Connards).

We have already seen that the chief producers of mysteries and sotties were the organizations. So it was with the moralities. What was the morality? It was a dramatic genre, similar to the comic theatre in form, to the serious theatre in aim. It always contained a moral lesson. Some critics have claimed, among them, Thomas Sibilet, a writer of the 16th century, that if the end of the morality had always been sad, true tragedies would have resulted. It was certainly drama in the fullest sense of the word. From what has just been said, it is pretty clear that the morality held the center ground between the sottie and the farce on the one hand, and the mystery on the other. The pathetic morality was perhaps the substance out of which developed Hardy's tragi-comedies. The comic morality might have been confounded with the farce had it not possessed the prime essential of the morality - a lesson. A number of mystic works also come under the name of allegorical morality. In the allegorical morality we find such characters as Méditation-de-la-Mort, Libre-Arbitre, Salut de l'Âme, Honte de dire ses péchés, Je-bois-à-vous and Je-vous-fais-raison. In the best known of the moralities, "Bien Advisé, Mal Advisé" (in its day, incorrectly called a mystery), there were fifty-nine such characters as Raison, Foy, Vaine gloire, Malle Fin, Honneur etc. It was in the political form, perhaps, that the morality came nearest to the comic genres, sottie and farce. This was a very common

medium of expressing political sentiment during the reign of Charles VII, Louis XI, Charles VIII and Louis XII.

The farce was, with the sottie, mystery and morality, the most popular genre of the Middle Ages in France. The people of those days being unfamiliar with the ways of other countries, demanded only an imitation of their own habits, the habits they knew. They asked that the priest, the noble, the merchant, the lawyer, the doctor, the soldier, the neighbor, be caricatured. It is under the head of farce that the "sermon joyeux" would come, since it is nothing but a caricature of the priest and the church service. The chief characteristic of the farce was its coarseness, its filth. The subject of the farce, according to the repertory compiled by Petit de Julleville, rarely varied from its three stock subjects: the infidelity of a wife, theft, and physical punishment. These were always a cause for uproarious laughter, since it was the other man's wife who was unfaithful, the other man who was the victim of a theft, the other man who was clubbed and beaten. Few farces have come down to us that possess any value. "Franc Archer de Bagnolet", "Les Trois Galants et Phlipot", "La Cornette" and "Le Cuvier" all varied to some extent from the eternal triangle, the theft and the beating, and are well worth while. "Les Trois Galants et Phlipot" especially is extremely amusing. The greatest of all the farces and the masterpiece of the Middle Ages in a dramatic way, is the farce of "Maistre Pierre Patelin", first presented, without doubt, on the stage of the Basoche. For the first time in the history of the theatre there was an able character development and a masterly handling of situations. Its theme is as simple as that of any of the farces of the Middle Ages - a rascally merchant, a rascally lawyer and a rascally boor try to dupe each other, but in turn are duped. But there is a finesse, a gayety that no

other play of the period possesses.

Were it not for "Maistre Patelin", the farce of the Middle Ages would be entirely commonplace and insipid. Unlike the mystery, killed by the Renaissance and the Reform, unlike the sottie, killed by definite governmental ruling, unlike the morality, which gave way to the Renaissance tragedy or tragi-comedy, the farce has maintained its existence even up to today.

One other factor in the comic theatre of the Middle Ages is the collège. The students formed the first of the sociétés joyeuses", of which we have already spoken, in the reign of Charlemagee . They first played only semi-liturgical dramas in Latin, but interests outside the school walls brought into their plays the vulgar language - and vulgar themes. Today the comedy in the collège is nothing if not insignificant, but at several times in its history it has exceeded in importance the regular work of the school. The comedy in the collège in the Middle Ages was a reflection of the comedy of the outside world. All the scandals, passions, grudges of the outside world had their echo among the students, and the scholastic theatre was inspired by all the ardent emotions which agitated the public mind. During the period of extraordinary liberty under Louis XII, the students frequently attacked the political régime, and even the eccentricities of the king himself. The sottie "Nouveau Monde" was a product of this reign. With Francis I's accession to the throne, the students were silenced by the same threats of punishment as the Basochiens and Enfants-sans-Souci. Early in 1516, the Parlement, at the behest of the king, forbade the directors of the collèges "de ne jouer, faire ne permettre de jouer, en leurs colleges, aucunes farces, sottises, et autres jeux contre l'honneur de Roy, de la Reyne, de Madame la duchesse d'Angoulesne, mere du dit seigneur, des seigneurs du sang,

> ne autres personnages estans autour
> de la personne du dit seigneur, sur peine
> de punition contre ceux qui feront le
> contraire, telle que la cour verra estre
> à faire"

When Francis I was captured, the students broke loose again.

Notwithstanding the frequency of their dramatic productions, few are the examples of plays extant composed and played by the student, although is known that a number of poets preferred to leave to the students the performance of their works to submitting them to other amateurs or to the professional players. The students played only on holidays, but holidays were numerous. They very commonly gave performances on the fêtes of St. Martin, St. Catherine, St. Nicholas, St. Louis, all patron saints of studies, at all the great religious holidays, especially Epiphany. They were strictly forbidden to play "jeux déshonnêtes". These "jeux dés_honnêtes" at first consisted of all plays, later of secularized religious plays. The Faculty of Arts of Paris ruled in 1470 that no student should assume the rôle of a fool during that year, either in or out of school, under the severe punishment of the loss of two years schooling. The Faculty later added "unless it be to play a farce or a morality". The scholastic theatre was still perhaps more licentious than that of any of the organizations we have mentioned, but its daring was its own undoing, for in 1579, the Edict of Blois the playing in collèges of "farces, tragédies, comédies, fables,

> satyres, scenes, ne autres jeux en latin ou
> françois, contenans lascivetez, injures,
> invectives, convices, ne aucun scandale
> contre aucun estat, ou personne publicque
> ou privée sur peine de prison et punition
> corporelle"

This was virtually the end of the theatre in the collège.

To the credit of the collège, however, must go the presentation of the first comedies or tragedies composed as a result of the Renaissance: Jodelle's Cléopâtre, and Grévin's "Les Ebahis", a most licentious comedy, and Grévin's "La Trésorière".

What did the different societies do for the improvement of the dramatic art? The answer must needs be negative. Their only positive offering is a few plays of note which stand alone in the midst of numerous worthless farces, sotties, mysteries, moralities, and miracles. If it had not been for "Maistre Patelin", the theatre from 1300 to 1550 might well be called quite barren. And the societies cannot take the credit for "Marstre Patelin", for without doubt, it would have been written and performed had no Basoche ever existed. The societies were a mere reflection of the times, - the people being vulgar, crudities, coarseness and filth were demanded. The dramatic poets responded in kind, partly to satisfy such wishes, partly because they were of the same flesh and blood and lack of culture and refinement as the people. Such societies could not exist after the Renaissance and the Reform, and it is significant that they all ceased to have any influence on the stage, even if they did not entirely expire, after the middle of the 16th century.

As we have remarked before, professional comedians, except "joueurs de personnages", did not make their appearance in France until the 16th century. We shall mention them here but casually, as they are less important factors in the French theatre of the Middle Ages than the associations. It was only after the middle of the 16th century that the comedians came into great prominence. As to the origin of the professional comedian, we believe that it is three-fold. First, the jongleurs. The larger part of the "jongleurs", to be sure, degraded into nothing more than mere acrobats, but one branch of them, the "satiriques", developed into comedians. Second, the "Joueurs de personnage". The "Joueurs de personnage" were already comedians in the 14th century. Their playing was their only

means of livelihood, and although their repertory was rather scanty, it would certainly be reasonable to assume that they also developed into real comedians. There were three positions open to the "joueurs de personnage"; noble, prelates, strange as it may seem, and the échevins of cities subsidized them. The cases were numerous of "joueurs de personnages" playing at the châteaus of nobles. Less often bishops and archbishops has players attached to their person. However sometimes there were almost open theatres at the abbeys. Many cities, especially in Northern France possessed troupes of their own during the 15th century. There were fourteen in Picardy alone. In some cities contests were held between the "joueurs", and prizes offered to the best actors. The third of the possible origins of the comedian were the "farceurs de métier". Their life was very hazardous. Unlike the "joueurs de personnage", they were not attached to, or subsidized by, anybody. The comic repertory that has come down to us does not date back as far as the 14th century, but doubtless much of the repertory of the 15th century was also played in the 14th. In addition, Petit de Julleville thinks that other comic genres which have never been developed might also have been known. It is doubtful whether the "joeurs de personnage" possessed a large repertory of truly dramatic quality, their acting being probably limited mostly to dialogues, slender farces or "sermons joyeux". To add to the difficulties in the life of a "joueur", he had to be able to take any kind of rôle in either comic or serious play; witness the comment an actor makes of himself in "Le Bien et le Mal des Dames".

"Si j'ay ung chaperon a fol
Passé au travers de mon col,
Je contrefays le bien disant,
Abondant à menus flajolz:

Onc on n'en veit de si plaisant.

Si j'ay ung chaperon de dueil,
Je me tourmente à moy tout seul.
Je pleure et me tourmente assez,
En souspirant la larme à l'oeil,
Ainsi qu'amys des trespassez.

Si j'ay une chappe à docteur,
Je contrefays de l'orateur,
Et, semble, à veoir à ma faconde
Ung tres-noble predicateur,
Estre le plus grant clerc du monde."

There were still other possible comedians in the groups of amateurs whose love for the theatre was so great that they not only performed in their own town, but traveled from city to city to give plays of both comic and serious genre. Their expenses were paid by voluntary contribu tions on the part of échevins or spectators. Their main interest was in the mystery, and the comedy was but a side line. Béthune, Chaumont and Lille had their traveling companies of amateur comedians. From that time on, comedians, in regular troupes, have existed in France, and for quite a while during the 16th and 17th centuries, they kept increasing in number. These troupes traversed all France, some, like the famous players of Moliere, playing principally in the Midi. Some of these companies had a director who engaged the members and paid them. Others shared in the financial success or failure, without any regular head. The latter comprised by far the greater number.

Many fruitless attempts have been made to trace individual actors through the Middle Ages. Actors had already begun to assume sobriquets which they often changed, apparently without reason. To add to the difficulty of following an actor's life, there is the fact that certain traditional names like Bontemps and Gautier were used by several different actors.

Unlike the sociétés sérieuses and the sociétés joyeuses, which

were held in high esteem by their fellow citizens, the troupes of traveling comedians were treated very severely by the authorities of the cities in which they played. Especially harsh was the treatment accorded them when there were dramatic societies located in the town. The comedians were often stopped from playing after they had appeared upon the stage for the first act. Driven from city to city, their lot was indeed a hard one. Only under the most rigid conditions were they ever allowed to play. Gradually this condition changed. For the comedian, acting was the only means of livelihood. By constant practice and playing, and a steady improvement in repertory, especially after the Reform and the Renaissance, the comedians naturally be came more adept than the Basochiens, the Enfants-sans-Souci or any of the independent amateur organizations which, to be sure, had neither the time nor the opportunity to devote exclusively to acting. With their improvement came success, and with success, the esteem of the people.

Besides the comedians just mentioned, there were others that figured in the French theatre of the Middle Ages. These were the Italian players who began to come into France in the 15th century,and continued throughout the 16th century. They made little impression on the public in the 15th century, but early in the 16th, under the protection of Francis I who had invited them to Paris, they assumed the leadership in the French comedy. Previous to this time the French stage had been slightly influenced by the Italian players, as a number of French actors had crossed the Italian frontier in the wake of the French army of invasion. Shortly after Francis I's invitation, the Italians had attained a very high position at the Court, thanks to the continued protection of the king. That the French actors were subordinate to them is

showed by the following agreement made by Pont-Alais, the greatest actor of the Middle Ages.

> "Ont esté mandez audit bureau, par mondit sieur le gouverneur, maistre Jehan du Pont-Alaix et maistre André Italien, estans au service du Roy, ausquels mondit sieur le gouverneur a enjoint faire et composer farces et moralitez les plus exquises et le plus brief que faire se pourra pour resjouyr le Roy et la Reyne à l'entrée de ladite dame: lesquels ont promis ce faire et, outre, ledit Du Pont Alaix a dit qu'il veut estre sujet audit maistre André et lui obeir"
> (Le Cérémonial François I, 787, taken from the registers of the Hôtel de Ville, Paris)

The middle of the 16th century saw the virtual end of the French theatre of the Middle Ages. As we have seen, the mysteries perished through the hostility of Catholics and Protestants on the one hand, and writers with literary scruples, notably the Pleiad, on the other. The comic or burlesque repertory had been too indecent to continue after the powerful influence of the Reform movement in France, the farce alone surviving.

There was, as we have already discovered, lack of art in the theatre of the Middle Ages. This was one of the chief reasons for its decline. The theatre of the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries depended almost entirely upon its crude, coarse painting of life as they found it, the cruder and coarser the better. By its realism it tried to make up for the want in art, but realism can never replace art. The manner in which it unnecessarily but inevitable antagonized Protestants and Catholics presaged an early death for itself. What was the reason for the lack of art in the French theatre? There were two interdependent causes. The first was the nature of the audience - brutal, vulgar, filth-loving. The second was the class of the dramatic writers who catered to the perverted

taste of such an audience. The former is perhaps the greater cause for the state in which the theatre found itself in the Middle Ages. It was the audience, the people who directed what should be played, and, even as today, the playwrights must comply with such orders, or not write at all. On the other hand, it is quite possible that, had there been writers of merit, their works would have been well received. From "Le Jeu de la Feuillée" to the farce of "Maistre Patelin", in the latter part of the 15th century, the theatre made no progress from the point of view of art, and it is not certain that it did not retrograde. And then, Patelin was but one bright exception in the barren period from 1200 to 1400. In the 16th century, no advance was made until the advent of the classical tragedy and the tragi-comedy.

A second main reason for the decline of the theatre of the Middle Ages was the improved taste of the audiences. The common people of the early 16th century were not as a whole greatly influenced by the Renaissance. They knew as little about pagan culture after the Renaissance as they had known before. Thus it is not to them that we can attribute the great change in taste, but to the upper classes who had been affected considerably affected by the new movement. We have already spoken of the opposition of both Protestants and Catholics after the Reform. With the Renaissance came a realization of how crude, how coarse the theatre was. It was, then, to the upper classes that the great Pleiad, and especially Joachim du Bellay in his "Epître Dédicatoire de la Deffence et Illustration de la langue francoyse", appealed. Addressing himself to the new poets of the Renaissance du Bellay wrote in behalf of pagan theatre:

> "Quant aux Comédies et Tragédies, si les Roys et les Republiques les vouloient restituer en leur ancienne dignité qu'ont usurpée les Farces et Moralitez, je seroy bien d'opinion que tu t'employasses, et si tu le veux faire pour l'ornement de ta lanque, tu scais où tu en doibs trouver les archetypes"
>
> (Second livre, chapitre IV)

It was but three years later that the first French comedy was produced - Jodelle's Eugéne or La Rencontre"? - and at the same time, the first classical tragedy in French - Jodelle's "Cléopâtre". Both met with a warm reception.

To realize with what revolutionary rapidity the theatre of the Middle Ages gave way to the theatre of the Renaissance - in a word, the modern theatre - one has but to notice a few dates. The right to play sacred mysteries was taken from the Confrérie de la Passion in November 1548. In January of the following year, Joachim du Bellay gave to the world his "Deffence et Illustration de la langue francoyse". In 1552, the first real French comedy and the first classical tragedy, both by a member of the Pleiad, were performed.

A final reason for the fall of the theatre of the Middle Ages was the advent of professional actors, who, in spite of unpopularity at the outset, gradually won over their audiences with their superior art and repertory.

We have seen several reasons for the fall of the theatre of the Middle Ages. Is there nothing to be said in its favor? The theatre of the Middle Ages in France gives us a better picture of the habits and characteristics of the people of the period than we can obtain in any other way. Whereas it was the pomp and ceremony which originally attracted the people to the miracle and the mystery, it was the growing coarseness and vulgarity which retained them.

The theatre was what the people made it. The public loved itself, and naturally wished to see itself - its taverns, its streets, its domestic affairs - represented on the stage. The actors, being, at first, all amateurs, were taken from all ranks of society and gave a true interpretation of society, its good and bad qualities. They possessed a passion for their pastime and a sincerity which would be hard to find among modern actors.

The theatre was more important, politically and socially, in the Middle Ages than it has ever been since then. The stage was the center of public life. Now acting is the profession of comparatively few; then, it was the avocation of many. Now, the theatre is one of many amusements; then , it was the sole amusement. The plays, much longer than any of ours today, were looked forward to as the one bright spot in an otherwise dull life.

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